

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 00145

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: WHERE TO NOW, M. CASTONGUAY?

1. FORMER MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, CLAUD CASTONGUAY, WHO IS FREQUENTLY MENTIONED AS PRIME CANDIDATE FOR QUEBEC LIBERAL PARTY LEADERSHIP, TODAY TOLD ME THAT PROVINCIAL LIBERALS MUST PRESENT VIABLE CONSTITUTIONAL THIRD OPTION TO QUEBEC VOTER OR PARTY WILL DISAPPEAR. CANADIAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS, HE SAID, NORMALLY LEND THEMSELVES TO A TWO PARTY SYSTEM. PRESENT SITUATION, WITH PQ, UN AND LIBERALS, IS ABNORMAL. EITHER LIBERALS OR UN WILL BECOME DOMINANT FEDERALIST PARTY AFTER NEXT GENERAL ELECTION. TO ASSURE THEIR SUCCESS, LIBERALS MUST ASSERT MODERATE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC POLICY WHILE CONTINUING TO SUPPORT FEDERALISM, ALBEIT IN ATTENUATED FORM. PARTY MUST ALSO HAVE STRONG, CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP. OTHERWISE, UN IS LIKELY BECOME PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION.

2. CASTONGUAY ASSUMES REFERENDUM WILL BE DEFEATED UNLESS SOME UNFORSEEN ISSUES KINDLE VOLATILE QUEBEC EMOTIONS. IN THIS REGARD, GOQ IS "PLAYING WITH FIRE" ON LANGUAGE QUESTION. CASTONGUAY IS APPREHENSIVE THAT HEATED DEBATE NOW COMMENCING ON RECENTLY
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ANNOUNCED LANGUAGE "CHARTER", UNLESS HANDLED WITH CARE AND RESTRAINT BY ALL SIDES, COULD PRODUCE NASTY ETHNIC CONFRONTATIONS IN MONTREAL. (OTHER MODERATE FRANCOPHONES MAY ALSO PRIVATELY HAVE EXPRESSED SIMILAR FEARS TO US WITHIN PAST FEW DAYS.)

3. CASTONGUAY, WHO HAS EXTENSIVE BUSINESS CONTACTS THROUGHOUT CANADA, SAYS HE SENSES MAJORITY OF CANADIANS ARE NOW READY FOR

MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION. HE BELIEVES ANGLO-CANADIANS, PARTICULARLY IN ONTARIO, WOULD ACCEPT GENEROUS DEVOLUTION OF POWERS TO QUEBEC IF THIS WOULD PRESERVE CANADIAN UNITY. THUS, HE SEES PRESENT CLIMATE AS PROPITIOUS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL NEGOTIATIONS AIMED AT SATISFYING DEMANDS FROM QUEBEC AND OTHER PROVINCES FOR GREATER DECENTRALIZATION OF CONFEDERATION. SHOULD PQ ATTEMPT NEGOTIATE NEW ASSOCIATION AFTER SEIZING INDEPENDENCE, HE DOUBTS SAME GENEROUS MOOD WOULD EXIST.

4. CASTONGUAY INDICATED THAT, FROM HIS PERSONAL AND HIS BUSINESS POINT OF VIEW, TIMING OF LIBERAL PARTY LEADERSHIP VACANCY IS UNFORTUNATE. HOWEVER, HE DID NOT INDICATE UNWILLINGNESS TO ASSUME LEADERSHIP IF OFFERED. RATHER WISTFULLY, HE COMMENTED THAT THERE ARE FEW STRONG CANDIDATES AVAILABLE. ONE HAD IMPRESSION, HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF AMONG THIS SELECT COMPANY. MCNAMARA

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